

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.



188 Gertrude Ellery considered that, having arrived at the dignity of fourteen years with several months added, she was quite competent—indeed, the proper person—to act as mistress of the mansion and attend to the comfort of “poor dear papa.”

This phrase she had caught from her maternal aunt, who had the habit of applying contemptuous adjectives to male humanity which is often observable in strong-minded spinsters.

Since Mrs. Ellery's death, this lady had devoted her talents to her brother-in-law and his daughter until a few months previous, when she had somewhat suddenly married a former lover. As he was a widower with six children, she probably considered that his claim must be made paramount to that of a bereaved husband who owned only one child.

Mr. Ellery had not been overwhelmed by her departure; but then he was a man who possessed a great deal of philosophy and was rather lazy besides. He had married, at one-and-twenty, a woman several years older than himself, and had allowed her full sway, reserving a certain amount of personal freedom; and when, in her last moments, she selected her sister to rule the house, he had submitted passively.

Mr. Ellery was an affectionate but by no means devoted father, and had never taken any part in his daughter's training. His wife's faith in her own judgment had been absolute, and she had early decided that her child would grow up a remarkable woman. The aunt shared this faith, which was also accepted by the old clergyman who directed Gertrude's studies.

The child possessed the unfortunate gift of precocity, and her rapid progress had always been cited by her mother and aunt as a proof of the superiority of private education. Mr. Ellery was amused and rather proud that, at ten, his daughter could read Virgil, study Greek verbs, and compute like a little lightning calculator. He warned Mr. Vicars not to overtax her, and there his part in the matter ended.

Gertrude's health did not suffer, but she

became a terrible prig: believed firmly in her own genius, and now regarded herself as grown up. It was May when her aunt married, and the niece had spent a month with the newly wedded pair. Mr. Ellery was absent when she returned home; the old servants thought it would be more agreeable to have her hold nominal sway than to pass under the rule of a stranger; so, from the housekeeper to her own spoiled maid, the band elected to treat her as if she were mistress.

Mr. Ellery had intended to secure a governess at once; but he was a born procrastinator, and even in this important matter he displayed his usual dilatoriness.

He was one of those idle men who always think themselves too busy to attend to anything which involves trouble or demands prompt action.

He had inherited a large property, much of it within the limits of a fast-growing city in one of the Middle States, and his home was a lovely old place several miles distant. Within the last few years, some mineral springs in the neighborhood had attracted the attention of capitalists, hotels had sprung up, villas been built, and, besides the agreeable society and amusement this brought near, Mr. Ellery's fortune was greatly increased, as he had owned most of the land in the vicinity. Altogether, he considered himself a very busy person, and as Gertrude's were uninterrupted, there seemed no immediate need of an instructor, though he would certainly find one before long. It diverted him to see the child play at being lady of the house, pour out his tea at breakfast, share his luncheon, and even join him at dinner. He enjoyed her vivacious conversation, though he noticed her priggishness, but consoled himself by thinking that a governess would very soon cure that failing, and a model one should be forthcoming early in the autumn.

Gertrude had inherited her mother's domineering spirit, but with much of her father's peculiarly charming manner, and she knew how to wheedle him, and appeared her best in his presence.

She was small for her age, but daintily formed, and exceedingly pretty. Her hair was beautiful: very thick and long, and she wore it either plaited in two heavy strands or lightly frizzed

and hanging loose; she craved a knot and a comb, and once tried the experiment, but her father managed to prevent a repetition. His method was far more effective than any reproof could have been. He shrieked with laughter when she appeared with her head thus decorated.

After this, Gertrude submitted to "pig-tails," and, as she was devoted to white, never devised any striking or unsuitable costumes.

In August, Mr. Ellery was away from home; when he returned, he was taken aback to perceive how completely Gertrude had made herself the head of the house. Emboldened by power, she fairly patronized him; she did not only think of him as "poor dear papa," but treated him as such. He was both amused and vexed, but his conscience pricked sorely for the governess was not yet found. However, this matter should be set right; in the meantime, it was useless to render life unpleasant to himself and Gertrude, by scolding or interference, and he did not see her at her worst.

A few days after his arrival, Miss Esther Channing came to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Dexter, who had that summer purchased a place near Siltou Springs. Mr. Ellery knew the young lady well, and was more in love with her than he had ever been with any other woman. His daughter had met her often while visiting relatives in New York, and honored Miss Channing with her liking.

Gertrude was delighted to see her again, but the acute lady was not slow to perceive that irreparable harm would be done to the poor child's character unless a radical change in her bringing-up were speedily effected, and quietly strove to influence her and open the father's eyes. This last was not difficult, for Gertrude had grown so secure of her position that her faults showed more plainly every day, and, before a fortnight was over, culminated in proceedings which roused even her indolent parent to the necessity of prompt and stern action.

Miss Channing, her aunt, and two other ladies accepted an invitation to dine at Greenbank. Mr. Ellery had two men stopping in the house, and the old clergyman, who acted as Gertrude's tutor, was also invited.

That small personage took her dining at table so much as a matter of course, that her father shrugged his shoulders helplessly and did not interfere—of course, privately informing his conscience that the governess should be provided without delay.

The day of the dinner, Mr. Ellery was

detained by a business engagement until so late that he hurried through his toilet, afraid the ladies might arrive before he could get downstairs. When he entered the library, however, he found only his daughter, the Reverend Mr. Vicars, and the two bachelor guests, both of whom had known Gertrude from childhood and always spoiled her abominably.

Presently, Mrs. Dexter and her niece arrived, and, immediately afterward, the two other lady guests and an additional gentleman.

Mr. Ellery led the way into the dining-room with Miss Channing, having asked Mrs. Dexter to sit opposite him and play hostess. To his horror, he saw Gertrude calmly lead her escort to that end of the table, and, in a flash, place Mrs. Dexter at the side, and herself assume the seat of hostess.

Mr. Ellery stared, dumb between astonishment and wrath—growing positively dizzy as he heard his daughter say sweetly:

"Dear papa, we need not trouble Mrs. Dexter—she has a headache, and you know I am used to playing hostess."

"And she does it well, too!" cried Mr. Travers, and the other bachelor and the clergyman echoed the sentiment.

Sweet old Mrs. Dexter nervously expressed her thanks to Gertrude for relieving her, and Mr. Ellery could only hold his peace—an approach to a scene was out of the question.

The dinner passed off sufficiently well, but, even with Miss Channing at his side—indeed, partly on account of it—Mr. Ellery was ill at ease. He could perceive that Gertrude was talking and laughing too much, urged on by injudicious Mr. Travers, who thought the child "great fun." During a general discussion about a new novel, Gertrude twice calmly added her voice, and, as the work was one which had caused much criticism by its peculiar social and religious views, it was not agreeable to be the father of the fourteen-year-old maid at that precise moment.

Mr. Ellery was heartily glad when the ladies rose, and, as soon as they had gone, grew alarmed lest Gertrude should still more unpleasantly distinguish herself in the drawing-room. While the host and Mr. Travers were talking, the other three gentlemen got into an argument about recent discoveries in the island of Cyprus, and Mr. Ellery referred them to books and plates in the library, and left them to their discussion.

"I'm going to have a cigarette before I join the ladies," Travers said. "You don't want to come, and I don't want you! Splendid eyes

Miss Channing has! She is such a thoroughbred looking creature!"

He said this with a significant smile, which made Mr. Ellery feel that the shrewd observer had penetrated his secret, and his slight confusion thereat caused him to hurry off without bestowing on his old friend the lecture he had meant to administer in regard to the outrageous spoiling of Gertrude.

As Mr. Ellery entered the drawing-room, he saw Miss Channing standing near a table, and immediately joined her. Farther away on a sofa sat Mrs. Dexter and the other two ladies, and Gertrude was entertaining the trio, her back toward the door.

"Oh, dear papa would not know how to manage without me," she was saying, in her incisive tones. "And I prefer masters—I should not like school."

Mr. Ellery glanced guiltily at Miss Channing; she smiled, sorry for his mortification, yet secretly feeling that it was well he should see how much to blame he had been where the girl was concerned.

"You ought to go to school, though," observed Miss Wilmot, whose surface had been ruffled by sundry patronizing remarks from the precocious damsel.

"Ah, you believe in schools?" rejoined Gertrude, with a whole volume of cool impertinence in her voice. "Dear Mrs. Dexter, have you seen that article by Herbert Spencer in the 'Fortnightly'?"

"Good heavens!" Mr. Ellery ejaculated, under his breath.

He made a step forward, but Miss Channing's hand touched his arm.

"I would not interfere," she urged, gently. "Don't mortify the child—that will only make matters worse."

"I never dreamed she was such an appalling mass of conceit, priggishness, and impertinence!" he fairly groaned.

"Probably the trouble has not struck very deep," Miss Channing said. "Gertrude is at an unfortunate age—and you must remember that circumstances have fostered her defects."

"Oh, it's my fault—I deserve to be caned!" Mr. Ellery cried, penitently. "I am thoroughly ashamed of my procrastination! A governess she must have immediately, but where find one fit to cope with her? Gertrude has a strong will; perhaps a school—"

"Nothing better for the curing of certain faults," Miss Channing answered, hopefully. "Put her under good training and into contact with other girls, and in six months she will

outgrow these follies; and she is very clever and exceedingly pretty."

It was pleasant to be consoled by Esther Channing's sweet voice and smile, and, as the gentlemen soon entered, and Mr. Travers took possession of Gertrude, the rest of the evening passed without any renewed shock to the father's susceptibilities.

Mr. Ellery carried his horror of scenes to an extreme which became morbid weakness, so he did not lecture his daughter the next day, though she unconsciously piled up fresh and more condemnatory evidence against herself.

A party of people drove over from the Springs; among them was a timid awkward girl of Gertrude's age, but fully a head taller, and it was a marvelous sight to watch little Miss Ellery's patronizing behavior toward her.

Before night, Gertrude had managed for the first time to get into difficulty with the old butler, who informed Mr. Ellery that: "Young Miss had threatened him with dismissal, and this was more than he could stand—go he must and would!"

Unfortunately for Gertrude, Mr. Ellery, while calling at Mrs. Dexter's, had been informed by Miss Channing that the principal of a boarding-school near Albany, in which she herself had passed several years, could receive Gertrude, although the autumn session had begun some weeks previous.

After listening to Saunders's report, and being forced to use a good deal of persuasion to pacify the invaluable old servant, Mr. Ellery descended on his daughter, thoroughly exasperated and determined to make short work of matters.

Go to school! Start within the week! Gertrude could scarcely believe her own ears; but when, in addition to this terrible verdict, she received for the first time in her life a lecture at once severe and contemptuous from the lips of "poor dear papa," she felt that the end of the world must be at hand.

She knew there would be no reversal of the sentence; she dared not even expostulate or plead. She could remember that, on the rare occasions when, in the face of some crisis, her father had been roused into pronouncing a fiat, neither her mother nor aunt had ever attempted opposition.

Mr. Ellery dined out, that evening, and the petted child was left alone in the first humiliation which had ever overtaken her. Long before bed-time, she had sunk into such depths of misery, that she was forced to seek a little comfort by confiding her woe to Lucy Crofts,

her personal attendant—a mere girl herself, and nearly as much spoiled as her young mistress.

"I wonder if Miss Channing would speak to papa?" Gertrude suggested, inspired by some thought of that lady.

Then Lucy Crofts revealed the secret which had been burning her lips for several days.

"Laws, Miss Gertrude," she cried, "if all's true I hear, she would be the last person to help you. They told me, over to the Springs, about your pa bein' so sweet on that Miss Channing. Everybody's talkin' about his marryin' her. Why, this school-business is likely all her doin'."

For the second time within the last twelve hours, positive little Miss Ellery found it difficult to trust the testimony of her own ears; and, though Lucy stood stoutly by her theory and evidence, Gertrude, before she cried herself to sleep, was able to recall various circumstances which aided her to hope that she had no cause to fear this crowning affliction.

That same evening, Gertrude was much in Miss Channing's mind; for Mr. Ellery had called to give her an account of his morning's work. She knew the poor child must be suffering terribly, and longed to comfort her; for she deserved pity rather than blame—her faults were mainly due to the folly or neglect of her elders.

The next day, Miss Channing drove over to see Gertrude, at an hour when she knew the father would be absent from home. The small damsel flew downstairs to meet her visitor, excited by a hope that, in her, she might secure a champion. Her dignity failed utterly, and she melted into tears as she entered the room, crying:

"Oh, Miss Channing—do please try to help me! Isn't it too dreadful? Papa says I am to go to school—after letting me feel that I was to be head of the house and all! And here I am nearly fifteen! He should have sent me before, if he expected me to endure it."

There was truth and reason in this outburst; still, Miss Channing was forced gently to explain that she, like all Gertrude's well-wishers, regarded the father's decision as wise and necessary.

"And there are so many pleasant things about school-life," she added, with her sweet winning smile, before her listener could find voice to make known her disappointment at the verdict. "You will be so much happier with girls of your own age—"

"I hate girls!" Gertrude broke in, passionately. "I have studied and read on subjects far beyond their comprehension."

"Possibly," rejoined Miss Channing; "yet, in many other equally important things, you could learn a great deal from them."

"And to be ordered about by teachers—oh, it is dreadful! It isn't as if I were used to interference—I have been allowed my freedom, permitted to consult my own tastes; and it is cruel to torment me now!" moaned Gertrude.

Miss Channing put her arm about the child in a tender embrace, as she answered:

"My dear, I should prove myself a very false friend if I did not plainly tell you that you need the discipline of a school. The life you are leading is the worst possible preparation for becoming what I feel certain your ideal of a woman must be."

Gertrude's temper blazed up; she was as unaccustomed to contradiction or reproof as if she had been a small Eastern potentate whose instructors even were slaves. She drew herself away from the kindly arm and said haughtily:

"My mother and aunt are my ideals; they were both always satisfied with me, too."

"If you had either beside you, the case would be very different," Miss Channing replied. "Ah, my dear, use your common-sense and reason; you possess a large share of those qualities: try to look at the matter in the right light."

"I know that papa is cruel, cruel!" Gertrude exclaimed, with fresh sobs, that sprang from anger, not grief. "Oh, I don't believe this is his doing—somebody has set him on! Poor dear papa is easily influenced—my aunt always said so!"

"You should not speak in that way, Gertrude: it is terribly disrespectful—I cannot listen," Miss Channing said.

The case so plainly demanded a few firm words, that she could not hesitate about uttering them, though the reproof which she proceeded to administer was gentle in tone and language. Gertrude replied insolently, and, when Miss Channing persisted, flamed into such wrath that she lost all self-control.

"Oh, then, it is true! I was told so, but would not believe it!" she cried. "This is your work—you want me out of the way! Oh, I never thought papa would marry! I can't bear it—I can't!"

"Stop, Gertrude!" Miss Channing commanded, turning very pale. And there was a power in the low clear voice and the resolute eyes which forced the girl into silence. "I hardly know whether your rhodomontade is more silly or impertinent. Once for all, recollect that any

woman who might consent to marry your father could easily dispense with your permission."

At this juncture, Mr. Vicars was announced, and Miss Channing immediately departed. Her aunt had gone out to spend the day and evening, and Esther took advantage of the solitude for long and profound meditation on a subject which had for some time demanded serious consideration.

The next morning, she went again to Mr. Ellery's house, and was received by Gertrude with a burst of penitent tears.

"It was very, very good of you to come, Miss Channing," she said. "Oh, I have been so ashamed of my rude speech—I wanted to write and apologize! But I am so obstinate, and—and I thought it would look as if I were afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes—that you might tell papa," Gertrude hurried on. "And it is not that. I am really sorry—oh, so sorry!"

"I knew you would be, when you had time to reflect," Miss Channing said. "Gertrude, I like you better at this minute than I ever expected to. I have great hope of you: a girl of your age who can achieve such a victory over herself deserves respect. Now, before we drop this subject forever, there is something I will tell you."

"Yes," Gertrude rejoined, in a choked voice.

"You need have no fear of me in any way," Miss Channing continued. "Your father never asked me to marry him—probably never will; but, were he to, I give you my word that I should not consent. I make this statement in order that your mind may be at rest."

"You—" Gertrude began, but Miss Channing checked her.

"Not a word more, please—that is done with! I am sure you would like to hear about Mrs. Kimberly and her school. She is a charming woman; I spent four happy years under her care, and I owe her a great deal."

Thanks to the conversation which ensued, and the fact of Miss Channing's wise counsels coming when shame and penitence were keen in Gertrude's mind, Mr. Ellery that evening enjoyed the agreeable surprise of finding his daughter not only submissive, but less martyr-like in looks and language.

Still, it was a terrible ordeal to the poor child, and the last day at home so dreary that she absolutely longed to have it over, though, before her father, she kept up tolerably well. In the afternoon, however, when she came in from a walk, and found her great trunk standing in
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her dressing-room, packed, corded, and ticketed, it seemed as if her heart would break.

She pushed her garden-hat back from her head and sat down on the box, her feet crossed before her, her hands lying listlessly in her lap, and gave way to grief too deep for tears, though the dramatic element in her was so strong that even at this crisis there was a dismal kind of comfort in the reflection that she was heroic in her submission and in picturing "poor dear papa's" remorse in case her health should fail through suffering and neglect.

Two days later, Gertrude's new life began under the supervision of a wise and estimable woman and in the companionship of young girls not inclined to permit any attempt at supremacy unless it were fairly earned by tact and talent.

The first months were hard to Gertrude; but she loved study, and this speedily recommended her to her teachers. Gradually, among her schoolmates she formed warm friendships and bitter animosities, and had the satisfaction of becoming a prominent figure in her little world. The close of the year was approaching, and Gertrude had begun to look forward to a brief return home, when she was surprised by a visit from her father. The news he brought was very dismal to hear: He had affairs which called him to Europe; he proposed sailing in a few days.

The "affairs," of which he spoke vaguely, were not connected with business. Esther Channing had refused to marry him, and he wanted to get away, in the hope that change and travel would help him to bear the keenest disappointment he had ever endured.

Gertrude's petulant expostulations certainly could not of themselves have led Miss Channing to her decision, yet they had borne fruit in that long vigil which I mentioned. When a very young girl, Esther had been engaged to a distant cousin, and through him she had suffered a great deal. She was seven-and-twenty now, and, though she could look back on her girlish dream with a pitying smile, its memory rendered her loath to let any man obtain sway over her heart.

She really loved Robert Ellery, but his indolence and lack of purpose in life had made her dread the declaration which her woman's instinct warned her was imminent. Then her own mother's unhappiness, through having married a widower with children, built up another barrier, and, when Gertrude's outburst came, it seemed a warning too clear to be disregarded. Probably, in any case, the pro-

posal would have received a negative answer; but the refusal might have been less decided—even have allowed a loophole for hope—had not Gertrude's interference come at the precise moment when her doubts and fears were uppermost.

So Mr. Ellery took his bitterness and grief off to foreign lands; and Miss Channing, in her loving care for every creature near, found a tranquillity which offered a very fair substitute for happiness.

To Gertrude, time passed swiftly and pleasantly. When summer brought vacation, she spent a portion of it with her aunt, and the remainder in the home of a schoolmate whose parents had once been quite intimate with her father.

Gertrude was past sixteen; still a dainty little fairy, but growing prettier every day. Her manner was wonderfully improved; she had lost all her priggishness and much of her conceit, but she was terribly headstrong and impetuous, causing great anxiety to over-conscientious Mrs. Kimberly, who had grown warmly attached to her wayward, clever, and now winning pupil.

During her visit to Anna Beaumont, Gertrude met George Randolph, a young fellow barely one-and-twenty, handsome, bright, and even more impetuous and less disciplined than herself.

Of course, the pair fell in love, exchanged vows of eternal fidelity, and arranged a plan by which they would be able to correspond without fear of discovery. Naturally, this secret engagement lent a new charm to Gertrude's daily life, and it was delightful, besides being in love, to appear a heroine in the eyes of her one confidante, Anna Beaumont. But the excitement, so far from hindering her studies, spurred her on to fresh effort. She was anxious to prove worthy of her lover's admiration, and also to shorten the season of tutelage and restraint.

Another winter elapsed, and Mr. Ellery still lingered in Europe, writing Gertrude beautiful letters, but quite content to leave her in Mrs. Kimberly's guardianship.

In the spring, a great misfortune befell all under that lady's charge. The widely esteemed schoolmistress died suddenly of heart-disease, and the establishment went into the hands of a stern unsympathetic spinster, whom few of the pupils liked, though her talent and experience induced most of the parents to leave their daughters with her.

The relations between this lady and Gertrude had always been what diplomats term "strained." Miss Gregory considered the girl sadly overrated; being herself tyrannical, she

was constantly irritated by her pupil's imperious positiveness, and naturally the schoolmistress's ill-concealed dislike was returned with interest.

When she found herself doomed to the sway of this tyrant, Gertrude wrote heart-rending appeals to her father, which that gentleman treated in a very characteristic manner. He promised that she should be sent to another school—he was coming home, and would attend to the matter.

Unexpectedly, he decided on a trip to Norway, and put off Gertrude's affairs, always meaning to ask some friend in America to inquire into her report.

So the weeks slipped by; finally in desperation, Gertrude wrote to Miss Channing, but, to her surprise and grief, received no answer. The truth was that Miss Channing did write, and her letter miscarried. Meanwhile, Gertrude's position grew daily more unendurable, for Miss Gregory was a petty woman, and tormented her designedly.

Her father paying no heed; her aunt gone to California; Miss Channing silent, after all her promises to give aid and support if ever such were needed! It seemed to the rebellious hardly-treated girl that the whole world had deserted her save one true heart. She was at length driven to reveal her woes to George Randolph. She speedily received sympathy without stint; and, very soon, the impatient ill-guided pair determined that they were old enough to take matters into their own hands and that Mr. Ellery's neglect gave them the right so to do.

This step had been only vaguely contemplated by Randolph, and his proposal came so suddenly on Gertrude that she had no leisure to meditate, even if the flurry in mind and heart would have permitted.

Randolph went to Albany. He managed to let Gertrude know of his arrival, and a meeting for the next day was agreed on. Miss Gregory chanced to be confined to her room by that unpoetical malady, a swollen face; and the head-teacher, who pitied Gertrude, readily acceded to her request to spend the day in the town with some acquaintances whom she was occasionally allowed to visit.

So the lovers met; and the sight of Gertrude's pale face, her deep distress, and her tragic declarations that, but for his love and sympathy, she must have been tempted to put an end to her miserable life, drove her tender-hearted knight quite frantic. The resolve which for days had been lying half dormant in his mind sprang up, eager and all-powerful.

"You cannot endure more—you shall not!" he cried. "Gertrude, there is only one way: we must be married at once—this very day."

"I cannot; it is impossible; no, no!" she pleaded, sorely frightened, yet with a great joy and yielding already brightening her beautiful eyes.

"If you love me, you will consent. This is the proof I ask. Gertrude, my darling, you will die here—I shall go mad!" George asseverated, wildly.

He poured forth a flood of plausible arguments: the step was forced on them; and oh! it would prevent the long waiting. He was twenty-two, his moderate fortune in his own control. He was about to start for Chili, to superintend a company in which he had investments; she could not let him go alone—he would not leave her in the hands of her pitiless enemy.

"And we can settle it all so easily," he continued, as she strove weakly to protest. "We will go to Voorheesville; a college-friend of mine has just become rector there: he will perform the ceremony. Oh, we can get a train in less than twenty minutes. Gertrude, come—you must! I will not leave you; it is my right to protect you—there is no other way."

"Oh, how can we?" she sobbed, even in the midst of her mingled distress and happiness, seized by a purely feminine scruple. "My clothes— I—"

"Haven't you on that lovely white dress—just meant for a bride?" he urged. "And I will send a messenger for your trunks as soon as we are married. My darling! my own! Think—to be always together; and nobody can blame you. We know your father would not object to our marriage later. It is his fault that we are forced to take this step."

Ah, well, the upshot of the passionate pleadings on his side and the tears and hesitation on hers was just what might have been expected in a couple more romantic than is common among the youth of this generation.

A quarter of an hour afterward, the two left the great nursery garden in which they met and drove to the station. They had some time to wait before the train would arrive. George procured his tickets, then they went out on the platform, which was nearly deserted.

Suddenly a whistle sounded, and George said:

"That is the Western express. We may as well stand here—there will be nobody that knows us."

They stepped a little further back, as the engine panted up. There was a rush of pas-

sengers from the cars, met by people crowding out of the waiting-room to secure seats. A lady who had just left the train was pushed full against Randolph, who did not see her; but Gertrude did, and grew faint with dismay. It was Esther Channing!

She and Randolph began mutual apologies; and, as the young man turned his face in her direction, she exclaimed:

"George—George Randolph! What on earth brings you here? I never was so astonished in my life!" Then she caught sight of his cowering companion, and added: "Gertrude! Why, Gertrude Ellery! And not a bit altered! So you got my telegram and came to meet me? But George—why, how do you happen to know each other? Who is with you, Gertrude?"

Then she stopped; the confusion in their faces warned her that, whatever explanations the pair might have to offer, they would be too serious to give in this place.

"Who would have dreamed of seeing you, Cousin Esther?" George cried, trying hard to speak easily, but dismally conscious that his cheeks were far too scarlet to comport with ease or dignity.

"Then Gertrude did not get my telegram?" said Miss Channing. Another glance at the girl's white face filled her with pity; she kissed both cold cheeks, adding: "George, lead the way; get us out of this crowd. Find a carriage, please; we will drive to a hotel first. I started so early, that I could eat no breakfast, and am dying for some luncheon and a cup of tea."

"You shall have both," said George, gathering his wits together as well as he might, as he took the lead.

"I have not heard your voice yet, Gertrude," said Miss Channing, slipping her arm through the girl's. "So you were not expecting me? I wondered you did not answer my letter; but it is all right, dear. I have heard from your father; he has empowered me to take you away from Miss Gregory's tender mercies."

"You were—you were—" stammered Gertrude, suddenly conscience-stricken.

"Oh, yes! You did not suppose I would desert you? And to find you with George—you know he is my cousin?"

But Gertrude did not; nothing had ever brought up Miss Channing's name between the pair. The poor child burst into tears, and, as soon as they were seated in the carriage, the whole story came out. George made the explanations, taking all the blame on himself, and Miss Channing was too wise to lecture him severely before Gertrude.

He heard a scorching review of his conduct, however, as soon as she could get him alone for a few moments, and, at the end of the colloquy, he was ready to submit to her decree with a tolerable show of patience.

Matters at the school were quickly settled, and, that very afternoon, Miss Channing and Gertrude started for Mrs. Dexter's villa at Silton Springs. George was permitted to accompany them part of the way, and Miss Channing gave the lovers an opportunity for a long tête-à-tête, smiling privately to think of the blame which many guardians of the young would have bestowed on such culpable leniency.

Three days later, George Randolph had sailed for South America, and Gertrude was enjoying a delightful visit with Esther. She spent two happy months there, and, at the end of them, she was a much wiser better-disciplined creature than on her arrival, though taught by example rather than precept.

Miss Channing's advice to young Randolph had been terse and trenchant.

"Don't begin by teaching the girl you love to practice deceit," she said. "Write like a man to Mr. Ellery—tell him about yourself, your prospects—ask him, if you do well, whether at the end of two years you may come back and claim his daughter's hand."

And George Randolph obeyed her to the letter, but the reply to his epistle had to follow him to Chili.

The advice Miss Channing gave Gertrude was equally sensible: "I do not ask you to tell your father about that folly I stopped: it was George's fault. I do not believe in confessions that only need easily mortify the giver and uselessly pain the receiver. Tell your father frankly that you feel you were wrong not to write him at once about your engagement; submit to his wishes, for I know that he will be unwilling you should consider yourself actually engaged until you are both older."

At the end of those two months, Mr. Ellery telegraphed his daughter that he had reached New York, and would be at Greenbank that evening. Of course, Gertrude returned home at once; the housekeeper had also received news, and was congratulating herself that some "mysterious warning" had made her get her whole domain in order only the week before.

Mr. Ellery arrived by an earlier train than he had expected, and the meeting between the father and daughter was full of happiness to both.

"You will be pretty some day, if you take care," Mr. Ellery said, laughing; "but you'll always stay a little dot!"

He looked as young and handsome as ever, and teased her in his old fashion; but about her love-affair he was sweetness itself, though non-committal.

"It may come to something," he said; "that depends on you and Randolph. You are both mere children—I can't have you engaged: his letters must be sent through me; but, when the two years are up, we shall see. He comes of good stock—I remember him as a boy; had a look of Miss Channing—she is well, you say?"

"Oh, and more beautiful than ever!" Gertrude cried, enthusiastically. "Papa, she is the best woman in the world; you can't thank her sufficiently; no words can describe what I owe to her!"

These were praises of which Mr. Ellery could not hear enough; and many times, in the course of the evening, he set Gertrude on afresh.

Several days passed; the two saw a great deal of Miss Channing; but a hope which had sprung up in Gertrude's mind seemed unlikely to find fulfillment. The girl was preparing to start for the school which had been decided on, ready and willing to go, but broken-hearted at finding that her father proposed setting out on a new journey—this time to the Sandwich Islands and Australia.

"Why not?" he rejoined, in answer to her expostulations. "I shall come back within twelve months; by that time, you can have done with school. In the meanwhile, what could I do here?"

"Oh," cried Gertrude, despairingly, "if you would only settle down! Oh, papa, why don't you marry Miss Channing?"

"I?" he asked, with a mirthless laugh. "Well, my dear, that's a question so impudent it really deserves an answer."

"Oh, papa, I didn't mean—Don't be vexed—"

"Not a bit," he interrupted. "I don't marry Miss Channing for the best reason in the world—she won't have me."

"Oh, you've not asked. She could not refuse—a queen might be glad!" cried Gertrude, indignantly. "And I had an idea she cared for you!"

"So had I once," he replied; "but she refused me. Somehow, I always thought somebody had made mischief—but I don't know. You see, I am a dawdler, and Miss Channing is terribly energetic—but I don't know. There was some other reason in the background; it's no good wondering, though. She seemed to think a widower might better devote himself to his responsibilities."

A sudden light dawned on Gertrude; she fell to wondering if her insolent outburst of long ago could have had anything to do with Miss Channing’s decision. She was too honest to remain silent after the belief forced itself on her mind, and she told her father what had occurred.

“Nonsense!” he said. “She was not likely to care what such a child liked or disliked.”

“But ask her again. Do ask her!” cried Gertrude. “Oh, if I were a man, I’d never give up, if I loved a woman, till she consented to marry me.”

“Upon my word, you’re a cool hand,” said her father.

“And you love her, papa; and oh! I am sure, sure she would not say ‘no’—”

“Miss Channing!” interrupted Saunders, flinging open the door.

Gertrude uttered a cry and darted forward; Mr. Ellery paused an instant, to recover himself.

“I remembered the commission you gave me, Gertrude,” Miss Channing said. “I have just heard— Oh, Mr. Ellery, I did not see you.”

“Ask her, papa!” cried Gertrude. “Oh, Miss Esther—darling, best Miss Esther! How could you refuse him? And he is so unhappy—he is going away again; and it was partly my fault—I know it was my horrible speech. And I want you to marry him; I can’t live without you.”

“Gertrude!” groaned her father.

“Oh, I beg your pardon; forgive me. Oh—” And away Gertrude ran, more terribly frightened than she had ever been in her life, leaving the astounded pair together.

Half an hour later, Gertrude, sitting crouched in the window-seat in her own room, was startled by a knock on the door, and, in another instant, Miss Channing entered.

“Oh, oh!” moaned Gertrude. “Please don’t be angry. I think I was crazy. I—”

“Gertrude dear!”

One glance at the beautiful eyes, the extended arms, and the girl ran toward her, crying:

“You have said ‘yes’! you have said ‘yes’!”

“My child, how could I possibly stand out when he had found such an unexpected ally?” rejoined Miss Channing, and then Gertrude was in her arms.

At the end of two years, George Randolph came back; and when, after the expiration of a few months, Gertrude consented to set a day for making him happy, she frankly told him there was one drawback.

“A drawback?” he repeated, incredulously.

“What is it?”

“That I shall only have you to depend on,” she replied, saucily, yet with a certain earnestness in her voice. “I believe you will make a tolerable husband: but oh, a husband can’t be my blessed Mamma Esther!”

“WE ALL DO FADE.”

ISAIAH lxiv, 6.

BY S. WHITE PAINE.

“We all do fade as a leaf”

In the breath of autumnal frost;
We turn from the mirror in silent grief
At the thought of a beauty lost.

Pallid and tuneless the lips

That mimicked the song-birds of yore,
When hued like the reddest red wine that drips
From the grapes of Levorno’s shore.

Faded the brown and gold

From the once luxuriant hair,

And eyes grown dim read the story old
Of “Ichabod” written there.

Faded the rose from the cheek,
Its velvety bloom all too brief.
O mortal changes! that grimly speak,
“We all do fade as a leaf.”

But look you again, and see,
Far away from the chattering rod,
Where fadeless youth shall forever be
Safe in the arms of God.

A MAIDEN’S EYES.

BY MARGARETTA LIPPINCOTT.

When first fringed lids reveal to you
Bright orbs that look in shy surprise,
You gaze in heaven through the blue
Of maiden’s eyes.

Their depths betoken Paradise,

If bards and lovers have told true,
And you declare their words are wise.

Deep-bid and yet so clear to view,
What mystery within them lies?
Strange witchery, forever new,
Of maiden’s eyes.

A STORY OF A DAKOTA BLIZZARD.

BY ADA MORELL.

It was a terrible winter; the snow had been falling for a night and a day, now covering the prairie with its soft robe until not a blade of dead grass showed dark above the surrounding whiteness.

The occupants of the few claim-shanties, scattered here and there over the prairie, fortified themselves against the cold by an unprecedented number of "hay-twists": for they knew that a blizzard might mean days of isolation, and, with the present accumulation of snow, a slight wind would render it unsafe to venture far from one's own door.

The precaution was well taken; for, as night again drew on, the rising wind not only piled the snow in great drifts, but sought every crack and cranny of the poorly-built houses. It was growing bitterly cold, too, and in many a cabin the fire must be kept up all night to prevent its occupants from freezing.

Ula Sharpe pushed back the curtain from the window and looked out into the night, but no object could be seen in the blinding storm.

"Oh, it is dreadful," she said to an elderly woman sitting by her, who seemed half servant and half companion, and who was, in fact, her old nurse, "to be all alone, so far from human habitation." She wrapped her shawl more closely about her, as she spoke, and drew nearer to the stove.

"Yes, dear," the other answered. "And I wish, as I have often told you, that we had never come on this wild-goose expedition."

"But this claim," was the reply, "was all I had left of what I thought a competence when papa died; and, unless we had come out, I would have lost the land."

"Well, well—it is too late now to cry over spilt milk. But how the wind shakes the window! I pity any poor soul that has to be out-of-doors, to-night."

For some time, Ula and the old nurse sat in silence. Meanwhile, to the excited imagination of the young girl, the wind often sounded like human voices calling for help. Perhaps, she said to herself more than once, someone might be freezing within a stone's-throw of the door. But what if anyone should come, asking admittance? Would they dare to let him in? She trembled at the thought: for they were two

unprotected women, all alone by themselves, and there had been reports of a band of robbers that rendezvoused in the gulches of the hills, so close at hand that they could be seen, on clear mornings, less than twenty miles away.

The tramping of horses' hoofs and the creaking of a sleigh at the door confirmed her worst fears. Her heart beat violently. She looked anxiously at her companion. The sleigh seemed to stop for a few moments. Then it passed on, and she drew a long breath of relief.

"We could never let them in," said her nurse, catching Ula's eye; "they might be robbers or murderers."

A half-hour passed again in silence. Then once more they heard the neighing of horses; next, a rap at the door; and, directly, the voice of a man saying he was lost and would like to find shelter for the night.

Ula hesitated. Her heart was ever open to the cry of distress. But the old nurse shook her head. They could hear the man stamping his feet and slapping his hands together to keep them from freezing.

"You need not be afraid that I will harm you," he said, after awhile.

"Who are you?" faltered Ula, in spite of her nurse's look.

"I am John Burke," was the reply, "and live about a mile from here; but I cannot find my way in the storm. I thought my horses would take me home without guiding; but I fear it is useless, and I shall perish if I have to stay out all night."

A word from her nurse would have made Ula yield. She stood in an agony of pity. What if the traveler should freeze, when she might save him?

She whispered to the woman: "We know of him, dear."

But the nurse answered:

"It may be someone deceiving us to gain admittance."

Ula heard him, at last, jump into his sleigh and drive off. She was both sorry and glad.

Meantime, her old nurse began to prepare the fire for retiring. But, before she had finished, they heard him again.

The truth was he had completely lost his way, and, in the blinding storm, had driven in a

circle, always coming back to the place from which he had started. Thus, twice he had returned unconsciously to her door.

This time, he said that, if they would not let him in, he would come in anyhow. Suiting his actions to his words, Ula felt the frail door giving way before a succession of rapid blows. She looked at her nurse. The latter was wringing her hands and crying "Oh, we shall both be murdered!" The lock of the door finally gave way, and, with pale set face, Ula saw a stalwart figure, in a buffalo overcoat, enter.

The traveler's mustache was white with snow and frost, and, as he removed his mittens, his fingers were seen to be frozen to bursting.

Coming from the intense cold to the warm room made him sick and faint. He staggered. In fact, he sank on the settle, half unconscious. But Ula had presence of mind enough to rub his face with camphor until he came back to his senses, doing this in her womanly pity and in spite of her nurse's signs to let him alone.

By this time, Ula had lost all fear. She helped him to remove his overcoat and bound up with healing salve his frozen fingers. The touch of a woman's hand seemed to be a new and delightful sensation to him. It was four years since he had left his Eastern home for the rough life of a claim-holder on the prairies of Dakota. Hence, the fair-haired girl who was showing such kindness in ministering to him awoke all the latent home-hungering in his soul, that had been dormant so long.

He noted the extreme tidiness of the room: the floor, with its carpet of gunny-sacks; the cupboard, improvised from a dry-goods box; the neat-looking bunk in one corner, shut off by a curtain, so as to form, as it were, a separate room; the table or shelf of pine, nailed to the side of the shanty; the dainty needlework that lay upon it; the engravings on the papered walls; the shelf of books: all making a pleasant and homelike picture.

"You find it very lonely, living in this way," he said, at last, in a musical voice, very unlike that of an ordinary "claim-holder."

"Yes," she replied, "but it will not be for long. My claim is a pre-emption, and I shall prove up in the spring, and return, with my good old nurse, to the East."

Meantime, at a sign from Ula, the old nurse began to prepare some food. The aroma of the hot coffee soon pervaded the room. She filled a cup, and offered it to the traveler.

"Ah, this is delicious," he said. "Far better than driving around in the cold. But now," when he had drunk and eaten, "I must go

and put my horses up in the shed I saw back of your cabin. They need warmth and food, too; and, luckily, I have some corn in the sleigh."

When he had gone, Ula turned to her companion. "Well, nurse," she said, "you ~~see~~ after all, he isn't a robber. And I've no doubt he is really what he calls himself. I am so glad now he forced his way in. I should have been filled with remorse all my days, if I had heard, to-morrow, that he had been found frozen to death in the snow."

It was not long before the stranger returned. Sitting together by the stove, while the old nurse dozed in her chair, Ula and he soon became comparatively well acquainted. The hours passed swiftly—too swiftly, John thought; for, in a new country, a bright female companion has a charm even greater than in a thickly settled community. When the dawn broke, he and Ula were still conversing. He rose with reluctance, saying: "Ah, I must go; I can see my way now." But he found an excuse to come again, the day after, to have his "fingers dressed," he said; and then she seemed so helpless and dainty, that he discovered many ways to aid her; in fact, he showed so much thoughtfulness for her comfort, that she really felt sorry when spring came, and the time approached for her to leave the Territory.

He took her to the station, about thirty miles away, and said good-bye so very calmly that he wondered at himself, while her only thought was "He does not care."

Autumn had seared the grass to brownness, when John Burke was driving over the prairie, one evening. Suddenly, he saw a light glimmering from the window of Ula Sharpe's cabin.

"Who can the intruder be?" he said.

His low knock was answered by a familiar voice; and, as he announced his name, the door flew open, and Ula stood before him.

"You are not glad to see me," she said.

But, with a sudden impulse, he caught her to his breast and kissed her cheek.

"Forgive me, Ula," he said, as he released her; "but I could not help it."

"I do not want you to help it, John," she said, in a whisper.

"And you have come to stay?" he said.

"Yes. I was ill."

"But not alone, Ula. I cannot let you live alone. Oh, you will let me care for you always."

"If you wish it," she whispered again.

And so she staid. Nor has she ever regretted it. There does not live a happier couple than the two who were thus romantically brought together by that great Dakota blizzard.